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ABSTRACT

Perspectives on college admission and problems of articulation between secondary and postsecondary institutions are addressed by a representative of the American Council on Education's Task Force on Higher Education Issues. It is suggested that there is widespread confusion about what colleges require for admission, and that many high school students do not feel compelled to undertake difficult courses. Problems identified by the task force that are exacerbated by the present lack of school-college interactions include: a decline in students' language, study, and computing skills; an increase in youth unemployment and lack of adaptability to technical careers; a lack of integration of instruction from high school to college levels; the inadequate preparation and shortage of teachers; and insufficient understanding of schools and colleges, which impedes student advising. Tentative task force recommendations are offered for improving the quality of college-school articulation, advancing educational standards, and improving the quality of teacher preparation. It is suggested that higher education leaders take the initiative with state boards of education to consider how high school standards can be advanced and how a college preparatory course of study can be developed to mesh with lower-level college courses. (SW)

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TESTIMONY

FOR THE

NATIONAL COMMISSION ON EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION'S

HEARING ON

COLLEGE ADMISSIONS AND THE TRANSITION TO

POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

June 23, 1982

Chicago, Illinois

by

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W. A. Kinnison Testimony
NCEE Hearing, Chicago, June 23, 1982
College Admissions--Transition to Post-Secondary Education

Members of the Commission, thank you for inviting me to participate in today's hearing on the important topic of college admissions and the transition to post-secondary education. It is a topic to which I have given much thought throughout my career in higher education which, in fact, I began as a college admissions officer. My interest in the subject has been rekindled recently by my involvement in two commissions: first, in 1980-81 as a member of the State of Ohio's Advisory Commission on Articulation Between Secondary Education and Ohio Colleges, and second, as a member of the American Council on Education's National Task Force on Higher Education Issues on which I presently serve. On the latter I also serve as a member of the Sub-Task Force on the K-12--College Connection. At their request, I will testify today as a representative of the National Task Force

The problems of articulation between secondary schools and post-secondary education are national in scope. For the past decade or more, we have been bombarded with articles in both professional journals and the popular press decrying the lack of basic academic skills among students entering our colleges and universities. Expanded educational opportunities and historic high collegiate enrollments brought with them increased concerns about basic competency, declining test scores, insufficient grasp of reading, writing, and computational skills. College faculties, high school teachers, administrators at both levels, school boards, trustees, parent organizations, state legislators, and panels of experts on task forces and commissions across the country have discussed,

debated, and analyzed these concerns.

As noted in the report of Ohio's Commission on Articulation, the problems are complex and deep. There is substantial evidence to support the claims that a large number of high school graduates who go on to college can neither read nor write at a satisfactory level for college work. Many who testified before the Ohio Commission also spoke of deficiencies in reasoning, analysis, critical thinking, and oral expression. Some colleges and universities, both public and private, discover that forty, to sixty, to ninety percent of their entering freshmen must take some remedial high school-level work in college. The number of institutions which give college credit for junior and senior high school work has reached such alarming proportions as to undermine seriously the value of the college degree itself. Consequently, many college and university degrees are now quite as debased as the national currency.

Clearly, many students' dismal lack of adequate preparation for post-secondary education cannot and should not be viwed solely as the fault of the nation's secondary schools. Overburdened teachers and their insufficient rewards, classroom disorder, low student motivation, the impact of television, hedonistic value systems, public indifference to education, and inadequate funding of education at all levels create an atmosphere in which learning is most assuredly jeopardized.

The solutions to these many problems confronting both secondary and post-secondary education are not simply curricular revisions. If students are entering college unprepared, then colleges, too, must share some of the responsibility. Guidance counselors and high school teachers tell us repeatedly of the difficulties they face in convincing college-bound students of the importance of taking the more difficult courses in high

school in order to enhance their preparation for college. The reason is simple. There is widespread confusion about what colleges and universities require for admission. In many cases there are no requirements. Anyone can enter a post-secondary program regardless of courses taken in high school or the record made there. In the absence of specific admissions requirements by many colleges and universities, high school students do not feel compelled to attempt the more rigorous courses of study.

The situation may be made even worse by the projected decline in college enrollments in the next ten years. It is doubtful that institutions fearful of declining enrollments will step forward boldly to tighten admissions standards. The result could be even further erosion in college preparatory programs, increased need for remediation, and still greater frustration for educators at all levels.

My earlier reference to more open access to higher education should not be misunderstood. Ours is a pluralistic society which has resulted, appropriately, in pluralistic post-secondary educational opportunities to serve a wide variety of student needs. The Ohio Articulation Commission concluded that the great educational achievements of recent decades must not be reversed as we attempt to address the problems of academic and professional competency in a democracy. The efforts to serve students from a wide range of social, intellectual, and educational levels in some form of post-secondary education must continue. In fairness, however, we must also find ways to provide all students the opportunity to achieve at the secondary level the necessary skills to function adequately in whatever program they choose to pursue at the post-secondary level.

But the very range of educational experiences designed for students has only added confusion to the articulation process between high schools and post-secondary education. The fact that some types of post-secondary educational experiences may require little in the way of specific high school preparation should not automatically lead one to assume that the same is true for students seeking a baccalaureate degree. Conversely, one should also not assume that a standard college preparatory curriculum need be a requirement for all forms of post-secondary education. Nevertheless, the evidence seems to be strong that all preparation for all post-secondary educational experiences is somewhat deficient.

The misunderstandings and frequent recriminations that result from discussing these issues suggest that some real barriers exist between secondary and post-secondary education. Unfortunately, many educators at both levels know little about what is happening outside their own domains. In many institutions of higher education, the relation with secondary schools is left to admissions officers and departments of education whose experiences are isolated and detached from the rest of their institutions.

Likewise, high school administrators and teachers frequently have little or no interaction with college faculties and administrators, nor is such interaction encouraged by the reward systems of communities or states. Coping with college and meeting college degree requirements is left to the student. The dialogue which really needs to occur between the high schools and colleges to assure a smoother transition for the student seems seldom to occur.

While the sub-task forces of the National Task Force on Higher Education Issues have not yet drafted their final reports, I wish to share with you a few of the tentative conclusions reached by members of the K-12--

College Connection Task Force and reported to the National Task Force at its third meeting last February.

First, we have identified several major problems which we feel are exacerbated by the present lack of school-college interaction:

1. A decline in students' writing, reading, communicating, studying, and computing skills.

2. An increase in youth unemployment and lack of adaptability to technical careers.

3. A lack of integration of instruction from high school to college levels so as to impede the educational progress of students.

4. The inadequate preparation of teachers and shortages in key areas.

5. Insufficient understanding of schools and colleges so as to impede the proper counseling of students.

Several recommendations are beginning to emerge from our deliberations. None, however, are cast in a final form, so the ideas I share with you today do not yet represent the final and best thought of the Task Force. What follows is only a brief summary of our current thinking on what I believe to be some of the more salient issues. The final list of recommendations will be longer and more complete than my quick overview today suggests.

First, the Task Force will very likely recommend some of the following steps to improve the quality of college-school articulation:

- The inclusion of K-12 personnel on appropriate advisory committees of colleges and universities.

- The establishment of special committees by colleges and universities to consider how their institutions can work constructively with the K-12 grades.

- The development of a variety of on-campus programs designed to

establish closer contact between colleges and K-12 teachers and students.

- A request that state leadership take responsibility for making the necessary organizational changes in state boards and bureaucracies to bring about closer collaboration.

Second, the Task Force will make several recommendations to advance educational standards, including:

- Asking higher education leaders to take initiative with state boards of education to consider how high school standards can be advanced and how a college preparatory course of study can be developed to mesh with lower-level college courses.

- Encouraging colleges and universities to maintain high standards of admission appropriate for their category of institution and to establish entry-level assessment of individual college student needs.

- Encouraging each college or university to give special recognition to students who have attained significant academic excellence.

- Inviting higher education's leadership in each state to work with the high school leadership to set a sound state standard for high school curricula, including vocational and remedial programs, with special emphasis on minimum units of instruction in various disciplines which must be mastered before college admission is permitted.

- Arriving at a standard for college preparatory curriculum that would reflect different competencies for diffierent levels of educational aspiration. Those seeking a baccalaureate degree, for example, might be expected to successfully complete a high school program which includes a minimum of four years of English, three years of mathematics/computation, two years of science, two years of a foreign language, and three years of courses distributed among the social sciences and humanities.

- Inviting each college or university president to reexamine their institution's academic and career advising systems and means of monitoring academic progress.

Third, the Task Force will call for the improvement of the quality of teacher preparation:

- By launching a further national study of teacher education programs.

- By upgrading the academic quality of students who enter teacher preparation programs.

- By inviting state leadership to take the initiative with appropriate public and private bodies to establish testing procedures for initial certification.

- By pressing state officials to consider the need for higher K-12 teacher salaries as an essential requirement to make the profession attractive to talented people.

The main point that I would like to make today, however, deals with process and not with specific issues, as important as they are. The problems of college admission and the transition to post-secondary education are enmeshed in two different sent of very serious educational problems and issues--those of the secondary schools which cannot be minimized, and those of colleges and universities which face very serious and rapid declines in enrollment and financial support.

There is a very good possibility that our respective commissions will have to pay so much attention to the very real and serious problems of each sector that the problems of articulation and transition between them will receive insufficient attention. I urge you in your report to emphasize the absolute necessity of further efforts at both national and state levels to involve secondary school and college and university leaders in further

discussions of these issues on a formal basis. Neither sector can be permitted to pursue solutions of its problems without adequate consideration of their interdependence. I have a feeling that we are where we are today because of insufficient attention to the interrelationships of the various parts of a total educational system.

Now, lest these remarks be misconstrued, let me make two points which relate to the essence of education in America and affect how specific actions might be planned and taken.

First, we must pursue democratic and not just elitist goals in education in America, but at the same time we must insist upon competence in a democracy. Second, America's educational strength has been built upon the freedom and autonomy of schools and colleges and the teachers within them and must continue to be so based; yet, at the same time we must insist upon coherence in the system. The solutions to our present problems must be pursued within these two constraints or tensions, and, in my opinion, the results will be better if we do so.

Pursuing solutions within these two principles, however, requires a greater degree of governmental restraint in education than has been the case in recent years, and a greater degree of cooperation and openness to discussion among educational leaders of secondary and post-secondary schools than has been true recently. It is quite likely that governments cannot solve the problems all by themselves and need to find new ways of relating to a competent, democratic, autonomous, and infinitely varied educational system which encourages freedom and diversity. It is a time for new initiatives.